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U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES FUNDING FOR RHODE ISLAND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT

Grant Will Fund Efforts to Computerize Domestic Violence Reporting

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee today approved spending legislation – the FY 2003 Commerce, State, Justice Appropriations bill – that includes \$300,000 to fund Rhode Island’s effort to fully computerize the state’s domestic violence reporting unit.

Specifically, the bill would provide \$300,000 to the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence to upgrade the state’s nationally recognized Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit (DV Unit). Rhode Island’s DV Unit collects information about incidences of domestic violence throughout the state, providing Rhode Island officials with an extremely accurate portrait of the state’s domestic violence problems. This funding will allow police officers to file domestic violence reports directly from mobile units.

On March 22, 2002, U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee wrote to Senators Ernest Hollings (D-NC) and Judd Gregg (R-NH), Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary, to request that the bill include \$300,000 in funding for this project. In his letters, Chafee noted that: “The establishment of the Rhode Island Supreme Court’s Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit, along with a system to compile accurate criminal data on the extent and severity of domestic violence and sexual assault in Rhode Island, enables the state government and private non-profits to better formulate domestic violence policy. Rhode Island has taken a lead in making this a reality.”

“Crimes of domestic violence often go unnoticed and overlooked, especially when such crimes don’t result in arrests or convictions,” Chafee said in announcing the committee’s approval today. “Sadly, the lack of accurate domestic violence statistics does not mean that the number and severity of domestic violence incidents has diminished.”

“Since 1988, Rhode Island has led the nation in collecting data on instances of domestic violence,” Chafee continued. “Rhode Island’s Domestic Violence Unit – established by the Domestic Violence Prevention Act – has become a model for states across the country. This modest funding will allow Rhode Island to employ the latest technology to ensure that every single instance of domestic violence is recorded.”

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“This is an important step in a very long process. I’m very pleased that the Senate Appropriations Committee has approved my funding request for Rhode Island’s Domestic Violence Unit. This money will make a huge difference in our efforts to curb domestic violence throughout our state. I will continue to work to ensure that this funding is in the bill that Congress ultimately sends to the President,” Chafee concluded.

Rhode Island’s Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit (DV Unit)

In 1988, Rhode Island enacted legislation – the Domestic Violence Prevention Act – which included a provision requiring every police officer who investigates an alleged incident of domestic violence to complete a domestic violence report, even if the investigation does not lead to an arrest. Collection of this information was charged to the Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit, which was placed under the administration of the Rhode Island Supreme Court.

While the initial domestic violence report forms were very basic, they became longer and more complicated as the data-system was refined and expanded. However, none of the data collected from 1989 through May 1996 were computerized.

In 1995, the Rhode Island Department of Health obtained a federal grant to purchase an optical scanner. As a result, the domestic violence report forms were changed to allow each form to be scanned into a computer database. Since 1999, this database has been available through the agency’s website: <http://www.ri-domesticviolence.org>.

The FY 2003 Federal Appropriation

The \$300,000 that was approved today by the Senate Appropriations Committee will allow the DV Unit to discard the traditional paper domestic violence report form, in favor of an electronic interface. Specifically, police officers will be able to complete the report on a mobile unit. The data will be sent electronically to the police department, and transferred to the DV Unit Access Database housed in McGrath Judiciary Complex, Wakefield, RI.

The funds will cover the costs of hiring one full-time data entry clerk, as well as two full-time staff members to track the data and coordinate training. The grant will also fund the costs of consulting fees and conferences related to research, database collection and analysis.

The grant is included in spending legislation that provides funds to the Departments of Commerce, State and Justice for the coming fiscal year. The Commerce, State, Justice Appropriations bill is one of 13 appropriations bills that Congress must approve each year.

The bill also includes funding for three additional Rhode Island projects for which Senator Chafee sought funding: Save the Bay’s Explore the Bay Marine Education Program (\$500,000); the acquisition of Rocky Point (\$1.9 million); and the Rhode Island Justice Commission’s police professionalism initiative (\$300,000).

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